

Dictionary faulted for ignoring 'Jap'

SAN FRANCISCO—The San Francisco Center for Japanese American Studies regards the omission of "Jap" as a derogatory term in the latest Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary a grave error that should be rectified.

The definition in the 1973 publication says "Jap" is an abbreviation for Japan or Japanese. That's all.

Dr. Clifford I. Uyeda, in a letter to the publishers on Aug. 4, wondered why other racial epithets as "Chinaman" and "nigger" were appropriately noted as derogatory or offensive but not with the term, "Jap".

The Wilson-Inouye incident pinpointed the grave error and the urgent need for correction. G & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass., was told. Dr. Uyeda noted international bodies, such as the United Nations, prefer the abbreviation, "Jpn" to denote Japan or Japanese.

Merriam's First Reply

In response five days later, the publishers said Dr. Uyeda's suggestion that a parallel existed to such racial epithets as "Chinaman" and "nigger" misses the mark. "These last two are nouns and the dictionary entry (for "Jap") is an abbreviation. What the dictionary records, then, is the fact that 'Jap' is widely used as an abbreviation of 'Japan' and of 'Japanese'."

The publishers said "Jpn" has little or no backing in their files and would be grateful for any instances of its use. On the other hand, "Jap" occurs as an abbreviation in many reference works, gazetteers and other dictionaries.

H. B. Woolf, editorial director, dictionaries, with Merriam Co., said: "The noun 'Jap' has come to be used less and less in recent years, and so it does not appear in any of our current abridged dictionaries. It is entered in Webster's Third New International Dictionary (unabridged) with an appropriate usage note ("used disparagingly")."

published in 1916, 1931, 1936, 1949 and 1963 carried "Jap" within its listing of abbreviation. The current edition (1973) has incorporated the abbreviations in the A-Z vocabulary.

Unabridged Dictionary

"If we decide to enter the noun 'Jap' at some future time, we will use the note 'usu. used disparagingly' that appears in the unabridged Webster's Third New International Dictionary", Dr. Uyeda was assured by Woolf in his letter of Aug. 21.

While Japanese Americans resent the use of the term and always acutely aware of its usage as a slur, their protests have been either ignored or went unnoticed, Dr. Uyeda noted in response Aug. 29.

With Japanese Americans holding public office in recent years, the true meaning of the term has surfaced and being realized by a greater number of Americans, Dr. Uyeda continued.

The recent embarrassing errors might have been avoided had such the prestigious Merriam-Webster dictionaries been correct in the interpretation of "Jap", Dr. Uyeda said. "Perpetuating the error is a disservice to all concerned," he concluded.

Unique Abbreviation

Raymond Okamura of Berkeley, whose letters with Merriam Co. were published in the Hokubei Mainichi, noted "Jap" was unique in that its abbreviation is identical to a derogatory noun.

Referring to the publisher's point that its use is becoming obsolete, Okamura noted its occasional use and "it is this residual problem to which we must address ourselves". He also urged Merriam to promote wider usage of "Jpn." as the abbreviation for "Japan" or "Japanese".

"It is my hope that the majority of Americans and other English-speaking peoples are sensitive enough to discontinue usage of an offensive abbreviation once the ob-

of compilation.

"Jap" first entered the Merriam unabridged dictionary in 1909. The English Oxford dictionary noted its use as a colloquial term of abbreviation as early as 1880.

The teenagers in the post-WW-2 era used "Jap" to mean an unexpected, tough ex-amination, according to the late Bennett Cerf of Random House in a 1958 Cerfbo column.



SMOULDERING LOSS—Acrid, brown smoke pours out of the 75-year-old building (behind the Sun Bldg. where the PC office is located) Sept. 7 in the worst Little Tokyo fire. Firemen estimated building damage in excess of \$150,000. Tenants were wholesale furniture dealers. It took 17 companies of firemen three hours to contain. Upper photo taken from E 2nd and Los Angeles St. looking northward. Lower photo is taken from Weller St. and E. 2nd. The Sun Bldg. is the white structure in the middle of the block.

—Photos Courtesy: Kashu Mainichi

Used as Noun

In a rebuttal dated Aug. 15, Dr. Uyeda reiterated their dictionary was completely in error. "Whether written or spoken, it is used as a noun," Dr. Uyeda declared. "For over two generations on the west coast of the United States, the term 'Jap' has been used with hate and contempt directly implied.

"If your dictionary is to accurately record the definition for 'Jap', it cannot ignore the fact that the term has been used, is being used, and is taken by Japanese Americans as a stinging racial epithet.

"I assure you that the resentment and bitterness engendered are very real indeed. To state otherwise is to misinform the users of your dictionary," Dr. Uyeda charged.

The last five Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionaries,

jections are made known. Otherwise the callousness of English-speaking peoples (including the editors of G. & C. Merriam Co.) becomes unspeakable," Okamura concluded.

(The Marine Exchange at Los Angeles - Long Beach identifies Japanese registered ships in port with "Ja.")

(The Kashu Mainichi English section has been using "Jpn" and "Jpnz" in its headlines to mean "Japan" and "Japanese" respectively.)

JACL Recalls

The JACL recalled Merriam Co. was the last of the major American dictionary firms to downgrade "Jap" in its definitions when it issued its unabridged Third Edition in 1961. Till then, it was described as "colloq. for Japanese".

By 1957, Random House, Thorndike-Barnhart and World Publishing Co. all noted "Jap" to be derogatory, offensive, contemptuous, etc. Funk-Wagnalls two years later listed "Jap" as an opprobrious term.

The efforts to have Merriam change came in wake of the Eastern-Midwest district convention in 1957 at Chicago with formation of a committee against derogation headed by Tom Hayashi and Shosuke Sasaki, both of New York. In the spring of 1958, then National President Roy Nishikawa announced Merriam acknowledged "Jap" should be "used disparingly" and would so note in its next unabridged edition, then in the process

le dolls presented in ange with U.S. found

shima a hit among Japanese citizens
umber then.

Mrs. Sugiyama discovered the one-meter-tall doll at the Baltimore Municipal Library in 1944 when she was taking care of Japanese internees. The doll was indicated as "Made in Hiroshima, Japan."

She explained the history of the doll to the chief of the library and asked him to preserve it. The long purple

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